



SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER



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by
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Introduction

For centuries, in the late middle ages, the spread of Christianity in Asia had been held up by the wide-spread conquests of the Muslim power. The followers of Mohammed were the fanatical enemies of Christianity during the long wars of the Crusades. For centuries they lay across all the land routes to the east. But in the last decade of the fifteenth century two events occurred that allowed Christian missions to flow again. In 1492 Columbus discovered America and in 1497 Vasco de Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope and opened up sea routes to the east. These two discoveries threw open to Christian zeal vast fields, white to the harvest, and resulted in a wonderful outburst of missionary activity. Spain and Portugal sent ships to the west and to the east. Along with the ships and their complements of sailors, soldiers, merchants, and adventurers were many zealous and intrepid missionaries.

A LEADER

Francis Xavier is the acknowledged leader of that army of missionaries. He was the spearhead in the most widespread and sustained missionary effort in the history of Christianity. By his heroic example and his burning letters, he drew the attention of Catholic Europe to the vast multitudes so suddenly revealed as waiting for the good news of the gospel. His courage, zeal, and enterprise made him the symbol and inspiration of all foreign missionaries. The Holy See named him the patron of foreign missions. His heroic achievement and his devotion to high ideals have been generously recognized even by historians who do not share his faith. His career has been called one of the most heroic efforts of human history.

Francis Xavier belonged to that old, strange, race--the Basques--who, even at the beginning of recorded history, were already settled on the north and south slopes of the Pyrenees. They were a sturdy, independent, mountain people with their own distinctive culture and language and an unshakable attachment to the Catholic Faith. The family of the Xaviers was noble on both sides and was noted for its traditional loyalty to the Kingdom of Navarre. When that kingdom was being absorbed by the growing power of the united powers of Arragon and Castile, the Xaviers fought gallantly in a losing cause and, as a result, suffered grievously in fortune.

Francis, the youngest of six children, was born on 7 April 1506 at castle Xavier. By his devout mother he was brought up in the purest practices of the Catholic religion. The castle chapel was the center of family life. There the chaplain and his assistant priests celebrated daily Mass and a solemn Mass on Sundays and recited the divine office. There Dona Maria gathered the children about her every evening to say the Rosary before a venerated crucifix and to sing the Salve Regina. How much the after career of Francis owed to the devotion of his mother! At the age of 18, Francis, a tall, dark, active young man set off for the University of Paris. This step was a break with the military traditions of his family. But Francis was sufficiently responsive to the spirit of the age to see that the university and the Church afforded a more brilliant prospect to talent than the army.

VIOLENT CHANGE

The change from the grim castle in Navarre, with its wide outlook on the Pyrenees, its simple way of life, and its strong Catholic spirit, to the university quarter of Paris was a violent one. The University of Paris was at that time the most celebrated seat of learning in Europe. It consisted of a mass of buildings, academic and ecclesiastic, set in the midst of grimy dwelling houses, separated by narrow noisy lanes, all huddled on the south bank of the Seine. Here, some 6,000 students from all the nations of Europe, speaking a babel of languages, lived, fought or wrangled. All the momentous questions, especially those concerned with religion, were fiercely debated in the inns and classrooms. It was the age of Luther, Calvin, and Henry VIII. The dangers to faith and morals were very great, but Francis was preserved from them, not only by his devout Catholic upbringing but also by the prayers of his sister Magdalen. Magdalen had been a lady-in-waiting to Queen Isabella of Castile and then entered the Poor Clare convent at Gandia. She had seen before anyone else the latent promise of her youngest brother.

Francis was very intelligent and rapidly advanced in his studies. He was a youth of inexhaustible energy, who soon became known for proficiency in athletics. In character, he was attractive and popular. With his personal gifts, supported by his family influence, he was clearly marked for a distinguished career. But God had other designs on him and brought him in contact with two men who diverted the course of his life. The first of these was Peter Faber, his roommate, a young man from Savoy who had been a shepherd but who had shown such a love for books that he had succeeded, in some way, in getting to Paris to study for the priesthood. He was a most candid soul with a sweet and loving disposition, who was already blessed with an easy, simple familiarity with God. Francis was much influenced by the sheer goodness and spirituality of his friend; but Faber's chief service to Francis was to introduce him to Ignatius Loyola.

SURRENDER

The conjunction of these two luminaries was a notable event in Church history. Ignatius was also a Basque and his ancestral castle was not far from that of the Xaviers. He was fifteen years older than Francis and had had a strange career. He was a soldier in the service of the monarchs of Castile and Arragon. In the defense of Pamplons against a French and Navarrese army, Ignatius had been wounded. In the course of a long and painful convalescence he was completely converted from his worldly and ambitious aims. For a dozen years he had led a life of the greatest austerity, going about dressed as a pilgrim, begging his bread. He was far advanced in the ways of God and was gifted with a big measure of contemplative prayer. He was fired with the desire to help souls, but it was only very slowly that he came to know definitely what God's designs on him were. He had come to Paris to study for the priesthood after a perilous pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Ignatius discerned at once the latent capability of Francis. He felt that with his intelligence, his energy, and his attractive, generous temperament that Francis could become an outstanding instrument for the salvation of souls. Old soldier that he was, Ignatius set about methodically the siege of Francis, to win him to his own ideas. It was a hard struggle. Ignatius confessed afterwards that Francis was the toughest material he had ever worked on. Francis clung obstinately to his worldly and ambitious dreams--the vision of a brilliant career in the Church which seemed within his grasp. But he at length capitulated to grace and his surrender was complete.

TRANSFORMATION

Ignatius put him through his famous Spiritual Exercises. Francis Xavier is probably the greatest achievement of the Exercises which, as Saint Francis de Sales said, within a century after their composition, had converted more souls than they had letters. Ignatius had constituted the Exercises as the entry, the novitiate, to the company that he meant to form. Their purpose was to communicate to others the great love of Christ and souls that was the master passion of his own life. Francis began the Exercises as a worldly man. He finished them a saint, a man entirely dedicated to the service of Christ. After Ignatius himself Francis may well be said to have grasped more firmly than anyone else the central idea they aimed to convey. He saw with unwavering conviction that love for Christ meant love for His cause and that such a love demanded complete sacrifice of self in all its forms, and the willing, even joyous, acceptance of all that a generous apostolic life would entail. His outlook was completely changed. The crowning grace prayed for in the closing contemplation of the Exercises “to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things” was given to him in full measure.

ORDINATION

He was ordained a priest in Venice on 24 June 1537. A brief period of ministry followed, which was a kind of test for his future work, of which he as yet knew nothing and which showed Ignatius that he was not mistaken in his estimate of Francis. In a general way, Francis was drawn to the foreign missions, but only according to the first idea of Ignatius, which was to work in the Holy Land for the conversion of the Muslims. But, God gave him some premonitions. On one occasion the companion who shared his room heard him cry out in his sleep, “O Jesus how crushed and fatigued I feel.” Next morning he explained that he had dreamt that he was carrying an Indian on his back and that the weight grew so much that it seemed to crush him to the earth.

ASSIGNMENT

The actual appointment to his mission came almost by accident. The king of Portugal wanted some Jesuits to go to the Indies in the merchant fleet that was soon to leave Lisbon. Ignatius appointed two Fathers, but one of them had fallen ill. Francis happened to be in Rome at the time. Ignatius, who was himself ill, called him, explained the situation, and said, “Master Francis here is your enterprise.” Francis replied, “Good; I am ready.” It was a short and simple interview but it led to great things. The two friends parted never to meet again in this life. But distance and time only served to increase the love that knit them together. In distant Malucca and Japan, Francis would read, on his knees, the letters from Ignatius that had taken a year and a half to reach him. The words in which Ignatius ended his letter, “I shall never forget you; entirely your own—Ignatius,” would move Francis to tears. He carried on all his voyages the signature of Ignatius and a copy of his vow in a reliquary that he hung round his neck.

A SAINT ABOARD

On 7 April 1541, on his thirty-fifth birthday, Francis boarded the flagship of the merchant flotilla at Lisbon. The voyage to India by the Cape of Good Hope was a perilous one and took the best part of a year. The dangers were so many that voyagers were advised to bring a winding sheet (shroud) with them. The ships were often becalmed on the west coast of Africa and could lay motionless under the fierce sun for weeks. The water ran short and grew foul. Fever made its

appearance and ran through the congested ships. Many died. It was so on the occasion of Francis' voyage. The danger and distress was a call to his devotion. He gave up his cabin to serve as an infirmary. He distributed the food he got at the Governor's table to those who needed it. He watched at the bedside of those who tossed in fever or delirium. He nursed them, consoled them, heard their confessions, prepared them for death, and buried them. He was on friendly terms with the roughest element on board--the sailors, soldiers, and adventurers who were going to the Indies to make their fortune by fair means or foul. No one could resist the goodness and genuine holiness of Francis. In a short time it was known throughout the fleet that they had a saint aboard. Thirteen months after leaving Lisbon the fleet reached Goa and Francis entered on his life's work.

CONQUEST OF A CONTINENT

It will help us to get a fair idea of Francis' career if we set him before a map of east Asia, as that is his true setting. We get at once an idea of the vast distances he traveled and the enormously diverse peoples he dealt with. His first field of labor was the long west coast of India. Making Goa his headquarters, he at once devoted his attention to the Portuguese who needed his ministrations badly. Then he turned to the natives with extraordinary success. He ranged up and down the immense coast line from Goa to Cape Comorin and, rounding the Cape, he then went as far north as San Thoma. Perhaps his most enduring work was done in that area. Nowhere is his memory more faithfully cherished than by the Goanese, among whom his body lies to this day. That vast area would have absorbed the energy and time of any other missionary. For Francis it was but the first step. A successful period in Ceylon was just an interlude. Reports came to him from distant Portuguese stations farther east so, at the end of August 1545, he struck across the bay of Bengal to Malacca, two thousand miles away. Malacca was the centre of the Portuguese power in the far east. It was one of the places the great but ruthless Albuquerque had wrested from the Muslim power in the renewal in Asia of the struggle that had been waged between the Cross and the Crescent for eight centuries on the Iberian peninsula. The Muslim power was widely spread in all the east. The Portuguese were biting into it with a series of strongholds and settlements. The two powers were bitter rivals in trade as well as in religion.

The passage through the strait of Malacca brought Francis into a new world--a vast ocean studded with islands and archipelagos--with a bewildering variety of peoples, religions, languages. On one extreme was the great empire of China, with a civilization elegant but ineffectual and as old as time. At the other extreme, were the head hunters of Borneo and Moro, where cannibals lurked in impenetrable thickets and jungles. Between these extremes was a wide gradation of cultures. The variety of religions was even greater. Buddhism, Muslimism, Hinduism, and Shintoism were widely spread. Around them and below there was a tropical growth of primitive and degraded native cults. Almost single handed Francis entered on this great field, but his reputation had crossed the bay of Bengal before him and he was met by a great multitude as he disembarked at Malacca.

Through this immense, bewildering world, Francis moved rapidly and decisively. His entry was momentous. It was at once felt that a new powerful spiritual force was released. He was an indefatigable traveler. The sea was his highway. He was at home on all sorts of craft--Portuguese merchantmen and caravels, fishing vessels, pirate ships, and Chinese junks. He was often alone with pagans for weeks on these voyages. He was drawn ever forward by the discovery of new fields that promised a harvest. Portuguese merchants had penetrated into these remote regions

“for cloves and souls,” as they said. But, in the quest for spices, pepper, cloves, and nutmegs, the souls got second place. Francis went after the souls. Neither distance nor danger could hold him up. The tall, lithe figure with the thick, rapidly silvering black hair, the decided energetic movements, and the dark eyes with their friendly glance, became known in every port from Goa to Japan. His very inexhaustible activity has been made a reproof and he has been called a “saint in a hurry,” a man urged by an inward restlessness, that gave him no time to consolidate his gains, but that drove him on to ever new and distant objectives. That criticism is refuted on almost every page of his voluminous correspondence, which testifies to his constant solicitude for the missions he had temporarily left behind. From far away Japan, shivering in flimsy rooms during an arctic winter, we find him writing detailed instructions and warnings to the priests he had appointed to his settlements. His letters to Europe show the same solicitude, especially those written to Saint Ignatius and the king of Portugal. His European letters had a much wider circle of readers and hearers than he dreamed of. They were copied out and sent in all directions and read in religious houses and universities. They were a revelation of a mighty work that had just begun and that mighty work was calling urgently for helpers. His letters were a trumpet calling from the new vast mission fields. Francis soon became a heroic, symbolic figure.

NEW PATHS

It should also be remembered, in estimating the career of Francis, that Francis was essentially a pioneer of the pagan missions; that his work was primarily to reconnoiter, to prospect. His true mission was to open up the vast pagan world to the new spirit of zeal, which was one of the chief signs of the spirit of the counter-reformation, expressed by the council of Trent. Catholic missionaries had been in the east before Francis embarked at Lisbon. Secular priests, Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, and other religious had gone east in Portuguese vessels and were working courageously in scattered mission settlements. But their work for the most part had been done for the Portuguese garrisons and settlements or in a small circle around them. But Francis was the standard bearer of a new movement. He blazed a trail. He had opened up a new era in Catholic pagan missions—the greatest in the history of the Church.

SPARED NO PAIN

The uncritical admiration of early biographers has done Francis a disservice by representing him as being spared the drudgery of missionary work by miraculous favors. For example, they say he usually had the gift of tongues through which he could be understood by a polyglot multitude. Thus, they rob him of the merit of his patient attempts to overcome the language difficulty by painful effort. As a matter of fact, he took the greatest pains to make the rudiments of the faith known to his hearers. He had the creed, its explanations, and the chief prayers translated into their languages. He toiled at the task of reading his lesson so it was intelligible. His reading often excited laughter or ridicule. The words in which he was instructed to express the Christian notions were often vague and misleading. But his great sincerity and his manifest holiness soon bore down all opposition. The results of his preaching were extraordinary. If we believe some of the powers granted to the first preachers of Christianity were too credulously attributed to Francis, certainly the outpouring of grace and the mass conversions that followed his preaching, we should then recall the scenes described in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. Whole villages trooped up to be baptized. He relates that on occasion his hands fell to his side

with the work of baptizing, and his voice failed with the frequent repetition of the words. Divine favors were frequent during almost every stage of his missionary life and they were multiplied after his death and burial at Goa. A short time after his death, one of his Jesuit brethren reports, "there are here a number of people who have met him. They have seen him perform things clearly supernatural among the pagans--such things as one reads in the lives of the saints of former times. People in whom full confidence can be placed have come to me and asked why we have not inquired into these things with a view to canonization."

He was so lovable that he attracted children, and saw in them little apostles, through whom he could have quick access to the parents. He would go through a village ringing a bell and the little ones would troop after this new Pied Piper to the church. For them, he put the creed into the form of hymns. The children learned to sing the hymns and then taught them to the parents. Later, the hymns were heard being sung by the men working in the fields or at their nets on the shore.

Like his Master, Francis associated the care of the sick with his preaching. He was drawn irresistibly to the hospitals. Lepers and those suffering from loathsome diseases were sought out. He spent hours at their bedside. He usually stayed at the hospital sleeping on a mat in the wards. There is an abundance of quite trustworthy evidence of his healing powers, of striking sudden cures, brought about by his touch, his prayers, and application of his staff.

But his chief care was always the sinners. Whether they were Portuguese or natives they were the first to get his loving attention. At every stage of his life as a priest--in Venice, Rome, Lisbon, aboard ship, wherever he preached--he devoted a great amount of time to the work of the confessional. Certainly for the Europeans it was a most necessary and fruitful ministry. The conditions in which they lived were a continuous incitement to a sensual and depraved life. Francis soon came to discover that one of the chief obstacles to the conversion of the natives was the example of the Europeans.

ENERGY AND COURAGE

Throughout the vast region in which he worked Francis was soon known as the holy Father. His great sanctity was quickly recognized. He was clearly a man who was possessed by his message. He was a man who cared only for one thing and cared for that supremely--that Christ should be known and served. His natural qualities also excited admiration. He was seen to be a man of indomitable courage. Typhoons, savage peoples, native rulers whose vices he lashed, the closeness of death in many forms, the prospect of imprisonment or torture worse than death--all these fears he despised. When preparing one of his brethren for the Japanese mission he said, "there is nothing you must so fight against as the fear of death. By despising death we manifest our superiority over these proud peoples." Another form of courage, rarer than physical courage, was the moral courage that will arm a man to denounce the conduct of those in authority. In his letters to the king of Portugal, on the misdemeanor of his servants, he spoke with a freedom and straightness that monarch did not hear from anyone else. Two other qualities, in high measure, went to make up the rich character of Francis. One was an inexhaustible spring of energy and enterprise that packed his days and even nights with an incredible amount of work. The other not often found along with this, was a marvelous sweetness of disposition that made him even more beloved than he was respected.

LOVE AND SERVICE

If we are to understand the secret of Francis' success, we must not omit the austerity of his life, which added immensely to the force of his spoken word. He lived on the scanty diet of the very poorest, a little fish and rice, never wine or meat. He usually went barefoot on the burning sands. His sleep was a few hours snatched from his work and prayers. A life of such toil and such austerity may well be considered as the greatest of his miracles. There could be only one explanation of a life that seemed to transcend the limits of human powers. That explanation must be sought in his interior spiritual life.

He was inspired and sustained by the absorbing love of our Lord Jesus Christ which had been enkindled by the Spiritual Exercises. The rule of charity was uncontested in every sphere of his life. His union with God was continuous and close. His activity did not rob him of the sense of God's presence. Love of God and service of God were not two things for him; they led to and supported each other. His whole crowded life was one prayer. His devotion to the Mass was visible to all. He was sometimes seen raised from the ground while he celebrated and often the server had to twitch his vestment to arouse him from the contemplation of the Host. He was often seen in ecstasy. When possible he would spend a great part of the night before the Blessed Sacrament. He was raised to a high degree of contemplative prayer, to the stage described by Saint Teresa, in which the soul seems to be divided, so that one part is busy in the work for souls while the other abides in constant union with God. Like his master, Ignatius, Francis was a contemplative in action.

We can well understand how his close constant contact with paganism was an unspeakable distress to such a lover of God. The obscene images, lurking in the dim temples, the foul rites, the gross superstitions, the deceits and vices of the Bonzes, the sacrifices offered to demons or animals--all this filled him with horror. He felt as if he was in a world in which evil spirits and degraded powers were in full control, where the true living God, with His Son Jesus Christ, had no place.

FRANCIS AT HIS BEST

In the life of Saint Paul, the first and greatest foreign missionary, a momentous decision had to be made when he decided to pass into Europe. Writing to the Corinthians he said, "a great and evident door is opened to me and many adversaries." The decision to go to Japan was similarly a momentous one for Francis. It was a door opening into a new world. The expedition to Japan is his greatest episode in a life full of great things. It is one of the supreme achievements in all missionary history. It shows Francis at his highest and best, as it called out all that was finest in him. The origin of it seemed something accidental. As he left the cathedral at Malacca, where he was celebrating a marriage, he met a friend, George Alvarez, who had returned from a trading voyage to Japan bringing with him a fugitive Japanese. This man's name was Anjiro. He had committed a murder and had fled his country to find peace of conscience. The meeting struck a chord in the soul of Francis. It was an answer to an unspoken prayer. He inquired eagerly about this strange, remote people who lived at the end of the world. Anjiro told him they were religious and had many monasteries crowded with monks, they were intelligent and had great universities, and they had a high esteem for nobility of blood and for personal bravery. To his question, "Were they likely to become Christians?", Anjiro answered that they would first ask many questions, they must have their doubts resolved, and then they would embrace

Christianity. From his first meeting with this runaway murderer, Francis fell in love with the Japanese people. Even when he discovered, by painful experience, that Anjiro's account was woefully inaccurate he still cherished them before any other people. "They are the best people thus far discovered" he wrote, "and it appears to me, among infidels, none will ever be found to excel the Japanese."

As Francis had been appointed by Ignatius, provincial superior of all the east missions, he had to settle the affairs of his great province before he could think of leaving for Japan. He had made up his mind that he should undertake this hazardous expedition. His friends pointed out that half of the ships that set out for Japan were lost because of storms or pirates. These dangers did not dismay Francis; but he was acutely conscious of the activity of the evil spirit. "The enemy is very active to prevent the voyage," he said. "I do not know what he fears from our enterprise." This interior opposition was a frequent experience of Francis; but he had never before felt it so strongly. "Combats within, fears without" had accompanied the decision of Saint Paul to enter Europe (ii. Cor. VII.) and similar experiences inaugurated the great enterprise of Francis.

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

He arranged with the captain of a Chinese junk to convey him to Japan. He had been generously helped by the Portuguese merchants with money and gifts. On the 24 June 1549, the feast of Saint John the Baptist, with two companions he set sail from Malacca. Every league carried him into the unknown. The captain soon grew afraid and wished to abandon the journey, but the vigorous remonstrances of Francis kept him to his engagement, until they met with a storm that carried the vessel irresistibly to their destination. On 15 August 1549, Francis stepped ashore at the port of Kagoxima, on the most southern island of Japan. There was a very special significance in the event. Fifteen centuries before, Our Lord at the moment of His Ascension, had given the Apostles the commission, "You shall be witnesses to Me . . . at the uttermost parts of the earth." The wave of missionary effort had spread ever wider during the centuries and now, in the person of Francis, it literally reached to the ends of the earth.

REJECTED AND DESPISED

Francis spent a little over two years in Japan from August 1549 to November 1551. It was the most difficult, and the most heroic, chapter in his career. The astounding success that had previously marked his earlier efforts and the esteem and reverence that had previously surrounded him were not found in Japan. Everything was quite different from what he had known or even expected. The flimsy houses, which were so poor a protection to the awful cold, the toy-like furniture, the strange food, the whole social and religious structure of society, the impossible language, the painful journeys, the difficulty of making contacts would have daunted anyone but Francis. Francis found the accounts given by Anjiro to be completely wide of the truth. His plan to seek out the king to get permission to preach was seen at once to be impossible. The country was in a state of political anarchy. The hereditary king had lost all power and the government in the provinces was in the hands of local rulers. The universities he had dreamt of entering, with a view to influence the intellectual classes, were closed to him. The Bonzes he met, were for the most part, vice-ridden, cynical men, who traded on the superstition of the people.

A great part of Francis' time was taken up with journeys from one local ruler, Daimyo, to another. These journeys involved extreme suffering. He was in the midst of the arctic Japanese winter and had only just come from the tropics. He had made no preparation to meet the new situation. When he and his companions traveled on foot they had to wade through icy streams and walk along rough roads that were frozen as hard as iron. They were stoned at nightfall out of the villages by the children and had to try to sleep in the woods. Francis traveled barefoot. Food was always hard to get. At times he traveled by sea, crouched on the open deck of a small craft, without any protection from the icy wind and frozen spray. With the assistance of Anjiro, who had become a Christian and at Baptism had taken the name of Paul of the Holy Faith, he had the creed translated into Japanese and for hours and weeks he toiled at the task of learning how to read the account. The Japanese had never seen a European before and the appearance of these strangers excited derisive laughter, which the attempts to read the gospel only increased. On one occasion as Francis' companion attempted to read his script a man came up and spat in his face.

SLOW HARVEST

But the sincerity and courage of Francis began to make itself felt, and in different places small groups of converts began to form. It was a slow and scanty harvest. It was the fruit of suffering that no other mission had experienced. But God was very good to him and inundated his soul with spiritual delights. As he trudged along the icy roads his feet were torn and lacerated and bled freely, leaving a red stain on the snow. An eyewitness gave a picture of Francis traveling in the retinue of a wealthy Japanese, running along with the other servants, tossing an apple into the air, filled with heavenly joy and oblivious of his sufferings.

But letters from India and Malacca made it clear that his return to these places was imperative. He left Bungo in November 1551 and after a terrible storm, during which the ship ran before the wind for five days without sight of sun or stars, he reached Malacca. While he went about settling the business of his province, his mind was occupied with thoughts of another and greater enterprise. Wherever he went in the far east he found a great respect and esteem for China, for its immensity, its civilization, its wealth, and its culture. This attitude was very pronounced in Japan. Francis was often asked how could his religion be the true one if it was not known to the Chinese. On his way back to Malacca he was shown letters smuggled out of Canton from Europeans imprisoned there. They described the barbarous tortures to which they were subject. They indicated that if the king of Portugal sent an embassy to the emperor of China they would be released.

GOING ONWARD ALONE

This news came to Francis as a confirmation of a resolution he had already formed--the resolution to enter China to preach the gospel. He knew only too well the hazards of the enterprise. China had long been hermetically sealed against foreigners. The few Portuguese who had managed to slip through the closed cordon had been at once arrested and tortured and then confined in underground dungeons pressed down to the earth with heavy beams. Francis was not to be averted from his design by these dangers. He said that he was more afraid of losing his trust in God by giving up the prospect. Portuguese friends again helped him generously and, armed with authority from the Pope and the king of Portugal, he was confident he would enter the closed empire and introduce Christ there. He was convinced the conversion of China would

mean the conversion of all the east. But the enterprise, at the last moment, was wrecked by the ill-will and jealousy of Don Alvarez the grand captain of the Malacca. He was immovable in his opposition and rejected all Francis' arguments and appeals with contempt.

It was a most severe blow and would have crushed another man. But Francis' courage and enterprise were not to be overcome. If he could not enter China in the train of the Portuguese ambassador and as the delegate of the Pope, he would enter alone and secretly. He secured a passage aboard a merchant ship to Sancian, a small island off Canton where Chinese and Portuguese merchants met to do business. He was now separated from China by only a few miles of sea. He arranged with the captain of a small junk to be ferried across and landed secretly at Canton. While he waited he ministered to the Portuguese merchants. He had them build a small chapel with branches and straw, where he said Mass. As the weeks passed, the vessels left the harbor one by one and returned to Malacca. The winter was approaching. Francis could be seen pacing the shore, stopping now and then to look out to sea, in the hope of catching sight of the sail he was expecting. When the boat had not appeared by the 20th of November he knew he had failed.

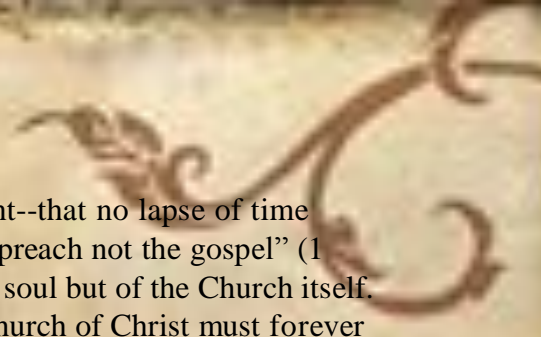
It would seem as if the disappointment suddenly undermined his strength. He fell into a fever and was brought aboard a vessel, but the tossing of the ship was very distressing and he was transferred to a small straw hut that let in the icy winds on all sides. He was attended by two youths, an Indian and a Chinese. His fever grew worse and he was bled. He did not utter a word of complaint. Then he became delirious and preached in different languages. His prayers were incessant invocations to the Blessed Trinity, to Our Lord, and Our Lady. Some of his prayers were in a language his hearers could not understand. It would appear that on his death bed he had gone back to the scenes of his childhood, to the chapel at Xavier castle, where he learned his prayers in Basque from his mother. After midnight on Saturday, the Third of December, the blessed candle was placed in his hands and he died with the name of Jesus on his lips. He was forty-six years of age.

His body was hastily buried and a quantity of quicklime put into the coffin. Some months afterwards, when the vessel was to return to Malacca, the coffin was opened and the body was found to be fresh and flexible, as if he were asleep. The body on its arrival at Malacca was received with the greatest reverence as that of a saint and apostle. His long journey back to Goa was a triumphant procession. At Goa he was buried in the cathedral among those who were his first converts, and who have always been loyal to his message and memory.

Saint Francis Xavier was beatified in 1619 and three years later was canonized with his master and friend Saint Ignatius. In 1748 he was constituted the patron of India and all the east, where he is revered as a great servant of God. In 1904 he was appointed the patron of the congregation of the Propagation of the Faith. In 1927 Saint Francis and Saint Therese of Lisieux were constituted by Pius XI as the principal patrons of all the missions and missionaries of the world.


EVER AN INSPIRATION

The lapse of time, through the changes and the shifting of emphasis that it inevitably brings, makes certain saints remote from later ages, though it does not lessen their heroic stature. The causes they served so nobly are no longer living issues. But history will never leave Saint Francis behind. The cause to which he gave such splendid service will always be a living one for the Church. "You shall be witnesses to Me—to the ends of the earth," was the last commission Christ



gave to His Apostles. It was a commission that must always be urgent--that no lapse of time would make out of date. When Saint Paul cried out, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel" (1 Cor. IX. 16) he voiced the abiding urge not merely of every apostolic soul but of the Church itself. The Church of Christ must forever be dynamic and expansive. The Church of Christ must forever strain to the fullest note of being Catholic, of being for all men. Its concern must always be to make Jesus Christ known to an ever widening circle of believers.

To the men and women who have responded and who will respond to this call of the Church, who have desired and will desire to be exiles and travelers for the name of Christ, Saint Francis Xavier will forever be an inspiration and an ideal. That courageous adventurer and tireless worker who penetrated to the remotest places, who was intrepid in the face of all dangers, who gave all to the service of souls, the great hearted friend of sinners, the sick, the outcasts, the saints who lived so close to Christ his Master, and who desired to set the whole world aflame with the love that blazed in his own heart, Saint Francis Xavier, will never cease to beckon to generous souls and lead them to the distant fields, that are always white to the harvest.





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